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AUTHOR	Lincoln, Yvonna S.
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ABSTRACT

Seen from within the discipline of qualitative methods, the move to experimental forms of representation of research is an effort to represent live experience more richly and to connect social science research more closely to literary, poetic, and performance forms that address communities and indigenous discursive structures outside of academe. Seen from outside the discipline, the proliferation of experimental or messy texts might be seen as a challenge to the traditional concept of the appropriate audiences for research. Audiencing, the cultural and ideological elicitation of texts serves to create possibilities for multiple texts, multiple forms, and the deployment of varied literary forms for higher education research as well as multiple explorations of research findings from different theoretical perspectives. Addressing different segments of the multiple communities the researcher wants to reach with different texts and different kinds of texts can be useful for the purposes the community defines for itself. This discussion connects the somewhat sparse literature from communications and cultural studies theorists on audiencing with concerns regarding textual experimentation and varieties of getting real. It suggests some yardsticks for gauging who new audiences might be, and it then speculates about the audiences and the best ways to reach them. (Contains 17 references.) (SLD)

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Audiencing Research: Textual Experimentation and Targeting for Whose Reality?

Yvonna S. Lincoln
Professor and M.T. Harrington
Chair of Educational Leadership
University Distinguished Professor of Higher Education

Educational Administration and Human
Resource Development Department
511 Harrington Tower
4226 TAMU
Texas A&M University
College Station, TX 77843-4226

Phone: (979) 845-2701
FAX: (979) 862-4347
E-mail: ysl@tamu.edu

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Y. Lincoln

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Audiencing Research

Seen from within the discipline of qualitative methods, the move to experimental forms of representation is both an effort to represent "lived experience" more richly, as well as to connect social science research more closely to literary, poetic and performance forms which address communities and indigenous discursive structures outside of academe. Seen from without that discipline, however, the proliferation of experimental, or "messy", texts might equally well be viewed as a challenge to a traditional concept of the appropriate audiences for research: policymakers and other scholars. From the former perspective, quarrels about textual form represent ongoing dialogues about how to create and portray a more meaningful, useful and "truthful" social science. From the latter perspective, "the text [is] an effect of the audience" (Fiske, 1994, p. 196). However, as audiences grow wider or more numerous (or, more accurately, as our ideas about who might be audiences is enlarged and enriched), and as challenges arise as to which images may be taken as "real" or worthwhile (and therefore be acted upon in the policy or community action arena), the number and kinds of possible texts grow with the possibilities for "audiencing".

"Audiencing"—the cultural and ideological elicitation of texts (Fiske, 1994)—serves to create possibilities for multiple texts, multiple forms, and the deployment not only of varied literary forms for higher education research, but also multiple explorations of research findings from different theoretical perspectives (e.g., feminist lenses, critical lenses, poststructural lenses, among others). Rather than unnecessarily limiting the debate to what sorts of methodologies are appropriate or

useful—a tactic which has been useful formerly in fostering a healthy methodological pluralism—or what kinds of texts are most appropriate to be generating, it may well be crucial at this stage of higher education policy inquiry to engage in audiencing, that is, addressing different segments of the multiple communities we desire to reach with different texts, and different kinds of texts, useful for the purposes which that community defines for itself.

A Structure for Considering Audiencing

Targeting audiences for higher education policy research is not new for the community of higher education researchers. A group has been active for several years within the Association for the Study of Higher Education which seeks to understand better and more precisely how to be responsive to the policy communities's needs for rapid turnaround in information gathering to service decision making; to understand more clearly how to frame research findings so that they will be both useful and compelling to policy communities; and which seeks to comprehend how to straighten and shorten the line between researchers and policy personnel (Terenzini, 1996). Others suggest that researchers are from Mars, while policy makers are from Venus (Birnbaum, 1998), arguing that the two communities exist in parallel, but have such different needs and purposes that research findings will continue to feed into the policy process indirectly and in less than linear fashion. Both of these issues are serious, and represent holes in the research-to-policy process, as well as suggesting why those holes exist. It is, however, not directly the policy community I wish to take up here. While it is true that higher education faces a context changing so rapidly and so forcefully that restructuring relationships with

the policy community seems not only prudent, but mandated, it is also the case that renewed and restructured ties with the policy community are not the sole way to influence public policy. Another way, not yet engaged in this generation save by higher education's critics and the radical Right, is to enter into a wider discourse with a broader variety of publics-- to change by enlarging our vision of what and who our audiences for research are. We face, in other words, two problems for the future: how to reconnect to policy communities in providing them with relevant and timely research, and how to identify and connect with those who can use our research to effect community change. These are clearly different audiences. We know the first reasonably well; we can only hazard guesses as to the others.

In the sections which follow, I will do three things. First, I will try to connect the somewhat sparse literature from communications and cultural studies theorists on audiencing with concerns regarding textual experimentation and varieties of "getting real". Second, I will try to suggest some yardsticks for gauging who new audiences might be. And finally, I will speculate about who those audiences are, and the best means for reaching those new audiences.

Defining, Identifying, "Desperately Seeking" Our Audiences

Ang's (1991) explosive theoretical dissection of television and its pursuit of the audience which assures its organizational survival, starts with the audience itself, putting

> 'the audience' at the center...--not as an unproblematic object of study, not as an empirical point of departure, but as an uncertain discursive construct, a moving resultant of the power-laden ways in

which it is known. (1991, p. x)

This focusing is a critical move, because it suggests that higher education researchers ought to be concerned, in parallel fashion, with the same issue: audiences for research are not givens, they are not unproblematic, and they are, in some postmodern sense, the outcome of our discursive practices. Our audiences <u>are not</u> unproblematic, and <u>they are</u> firmly a result of our discursive practices. When we define our audience as the policy community, or as other scholars, we deliberately forgo the possibilities for an enlarged vision of research, of social action within communities, of community action itself (Greenwood and Levin, 1998), of reconnections between higher education and the communities they serve.

To paraphrase Ang, "Quite obviously, before there was [higher education research], there was no such thing as a [higher education policy] audience. The [higher education policy] audience then is not an ontological given, but a socially-constituted and institutionally-produced category" (1991, p. xi). Her central point regarding scholarly research having been "colonized" by the institutional point of view is especially telling here; it harkens back to Fine, Weis, Weseen and Wong's (2000) critique of social science's providing a unitary view of silent populations, often to their detriment.

Beninger (1986) opened the subject of research in an information-saturated society as "technologies of control", reiterating the probability that such technologies (and the information they produce) are not value-neutral, nor are they objective. Rather, the technologies themselves (surveys, audience temperament measurements, or, more broadly, any form of data collection and analysis) are sites--contexts where power relations are deployed, played out, reformulated, or

reinscribed.[1] When viewed as a technology of control, research takes on a more sinister, and somewhat Foucauldian, character. If Ang is correct that

> ...scientific discourse is the source of one of the most powerful modalities of knowledge...[and that] Empirical science's prestige as the privileged domain of objective, systematic, verified truth is an effect of its own power to extend itself to ever more corners of human life, not the result of the inherent quality of its claims (1991, p. 9),

then higher education policy research is more precarious than we might have originally assumed from Terenzini's (1996) remarks (and for vastly different reasons). It is precarious—and indeed, vulnerable--because it is *au fond* one of the more powerful of many social arrangements which has as it founding premise social control, the arrogation to itself of high social prestige in the world of knowledge (thereby devaluing the currency of other forms of knowledge/ways of knowing), and not necessarily, as Ang suggests, providing the warrants for the claims to quality which it makes.

In the case of higher education policy research, we may be responsive to a policy community which is in some ways complicit with us in the creation of these forms of technologies of control. We may be willing, albeit well-intentioned, partners in colonizing and re-colonizing ourselves within (and on behalf of) institutions, tending to scholarly audiences who themselves are attuned only to the "institutional point of view". As well, we may be rendering ourselves increasingly "distanced" from those for whom our research might make a difference.

This insight, unfortunately, leaves us no closer to re-orienting ourselves to other, broader audiences, to altering the discourse around whom our texts might

serve. Just as we ignore those stakeholders of the social mind, to paraphrase Edgar Schein, they take little account of us. Fiske (1992) and Ang (1991) are especially compelling in suggesting that audiences get on with their lives alongside (and despite) our social science investigations of those lives. They cope "in a myriad of creative yet tacit ways, whose details elude and escape the formal structures set up by the institutions" (Ang, p. 1), or what Fiske (1992) calls "the material practices of everyday culture *and our difficulty in studying them*" (p. 155, emphasis added). We can arbitrarily and forcefully alter this sense of the "ontological given", expanding our range of possibilities for meaningful social change via reordering our sense of who our audiences might be.

What Reaches Audiences?

As I suggested earlier, the audiences we might wish to add to our textual and action "address lists" are those who are stakeholders of the social mind, those whose lives on which we report, those for whom having more and better understandings of their community contexts might make a genuine difference in their ability to effect local change, those who could be moved to action on their own behalf, those for whom enlarged understandings might make a positive qualitative difference in their abilities to acquire agency and control over the circumstances of their own existence. Most frequently, they are those among and with whom we have conducted the research itself.[2] They go by different names. They are communities, neighborhoods, "policy targets", the poor, the underserved, research respondents, or, sadly, our "subjects".

Why it is we believe we can change the world by extracting data from our research respondents, then feed it to others in our own scholarly communities and institutions, and hope it reaches a policy audience sometime, somewhere, all in the service of making the world more sane, more equitable, for our research respondents is (now at my advanced age) beyond me. It is a Rube Goldberg-ian model for social change, if you will: sex designed by the former Soviet military-industrial complex. Why not, as one of my friends was wont to say, eliminate the middleman? Or at least specify when we wish to deal with the middleman, and otherwise target our research findings to those who would be empowered to change their own lives, if they but knew how and were armed with facts, insights, understandings.

Given all that, let us try to imagine, using some categories developed by Fiske (1992), how to "get real" with some of the audiences with which we only rarely connect. [3] It is my personal prejudice that it is only now that we are beginning to "know" who our research respondents are. What has made it possible for us to make this shift from a distanced social science to a personal and inter-subjective and inter-subjectively critical social knowledge has been the tectonic shift in what we conceive the project of social science to be—from scientific findings to social understandings—and how we go about getting from there to here. The latter is captured best by Ang's (1991, p. x) insight that "...ethnography, conceived not just as a research method but as—within the academic field—a discursive practice *par excellence* that foregrounds the diverse, the particular and the unpredictable in everyday life, is especially suitable to free us from the desperate search for totalizing accounts...that characterizes much official knowledge..." The "new" ethnography, encompassing autoethnography, life histories, performance drama, poetic forms, ethnographic

fiction, narrative analysis, "messy" and experimental texts, performance ethnography and many others, seeks first and foremost to tear down the wall between science and literature, and second, to enable connections between social understandings and oral and community traditions. Multiple non-scholarly forms of data presentation greatly improve the chances that those who are out of the loop on the latest academic journals will actually have access to findings which they can employ, use, take advantage of, to alter the conditions of their lives.

We are exploring, with our experimental, poetic, literary and messy texts, new ways with words, seeking to find some discursive structures which will reach out, help us to connect. Ginnie Olesen's (2001) pained observation is at work here: "We of the audiences are immobilized by the artful, intimate revelations that evoke our own private dreams, fears, longings....We are fixed like ancient insects in amber without the language to discuss, must less comment on or criticize what we have heard and experienced (p. 270)." It is here, immobilized, that we turn to our audiences themselves for some idea of how to speak, where to find a new language, of how to make the single authentic moment, the deeper connection.

Fiske opens up some possibilities (1992). He proposes several categories which help us to move beyond our narrow academic worlds to "get real" with our audiences: texture, "habitus", and sacred inarticulateness. Those categories seem like useful places to begin.

Texture. Fiske defines "texture" after Britt Williams' (1988) own definition: "dense, vivid, detailed interwoven narratives, relationships, and everyday life are compensated for and contradicted by the density and intensity of the experiences, practices and objects packed into them" (p. 155). In defining

cultural work in this way, Fiske is demanding a longer look at the "embodied practices" of communities in which inquiries occur. It is a deepening and enriching consideration of thick description, that is, thick description beyond categories, classifications, taxonomies, to the material circumstances, the physicality, the experiences, the practices, routines, relationships, the movement through a socially dense, emotionally capacious, object and context-fertile "habitus".

Habitus. "Habitus" is not a concept frequently dealt with in the higher education literature, and it has been totally ignored in the policy literature. The concept is borrowed from Bourdieu (1977, 1984); Fiske (1992), a cultural studies scholar, defines it this way:

> The concept of "habitus" contains the meanings of habitat, habitant, the processes of habitation and habit, *particularly habits of thought.* A habitat is a social environment in which we live: it is a product of both its position in the social space and of the practices of the social beings who inhabit it. The social space is...a multidimensional map of the social order in which the main axes are economic capital, cultural capital, education, class and historical trajectories; in it, the material, the symbolic and the historical are not separate categories but interactive lines of force... (1992, p. 155, italics not in original).

Within this brief definition of habitus lie several critical points for "constructing" audiences for our research. First among those critical points would be the "habits of thought", which resonates strongly to the "habits of the heart" (which are, frequently

connected to habits of thought) of Bellah and his colleagues (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton, 1985). Habits of thought contain "received views" (frequently, values, attitudes and beliefs inherited from familial and other social contexts), shaped or formed views acquired in the process of maturation (attitudes and beliefs coalesced from life experiences), and cultural views (that is, values and beliefs which are absorbed from the surrounding cultural or sub-cultural context. Clearly, the "habits of thought" of many of our audiences are vastly different from those "habits of thought" which characterize either the higher education research community, or the higher education policy community. And as both Birnbaum (1998) and Terenzini (1996) observe, those two communities themselves appear to exist on different planes or in different spheres, possessing very different habits of thought from one another.

The second critical feature of the "habitus" is that the social environment is a product both of its social space, and of the practices of the social beings who inhabit it. We can be almost certain that the "social space" and the "practices" of some of our potential audiences are unlike our own. We frequently do not share neighborhoods, or neighborhood schools (although many of our urban universities do share these neighborhoods). We do not shop, or eat, at the same places, nor do we frequent the same cultural, artistic, or social events. The higher education research community may not even widely share a common first language with some of our audiences. And the social practices of some of our audiences in contrast with those of ourselves could be said to be constituted in entirely different cultural spheres.

Learning to speak across cultures will not be easy. We are, in the higher education research community, much more comfortable with extracting data

(Oakley, 198) from those not in our own social class than we are with interacting as respectful equals. We would much rather "research up", work with the policy community, and share in their rarified glory –where we will also earn more in approbation, external funding and visibility—than to slog away in the trenches, working in the neighborhoods in our own cities with those starkly different from ourselves, whose "habits of thought" and first/native languages may seem foreign, even repellent, to our orderly existences. As a consequence, thinking through additional "audiences" for our research may be a tough and painful process for the higher education research community.

The final critical elements of "habitus", as signifiers for where we will locate audiences for our research, are to be found on that "multidimensional map", the axes of which are "economic capital, cultural capital, education, class and historical trajectories". The multidimensionality of that map is not always clear to us, except as we experiencing the "distancing" (Fiske, op. cit.) which education and social class lend us, and the ahistoricity which becomes a part of our own habitus as scholars. In part, we understand the distancing effects of our previous models of research, and comprehend the objectifying effects of treating research respondents as mere data sources, to be mined for what they contribute to our own careers (Keller, 1985). We have not, however, fully studied the distancing effects of social class or of historical trajectories, and those elements will become nodes and linkages in the search for audiences who can profit from higher education research.

"Sacred Inarticulateness". In treating this dimension, Fiske refers back to the work of Levine (1972), who explains the concept as "people's inability to explain

their most sacred institutions in an objective discourse" (1992, p. 158). Fiske observes that "practices can circulate and reproduce culture without their meanings passing through discourse or consciousness...[and that] to study practices we need to bring it to the level of discourse, but in doing so we change its ontological status, for a defining feature of the practice is that it is *not* discourse" (p. 159). There is, as Fiske (and Bourdieu) point out, no satisfactory solution to that problem yet, but in the "getting real" process, one strategy available to scholars and narrators will be to take the solid advice of critical methodologists and create more open-ended, "skirted", "pleated" texts—texts without closure, texts which avoid "monumentalism" and a sense of timelessness (Rosaldo, 1989) in favor of dynamism, inherent unpredictability, and constantly shifting social realities.

Objective discourse, obviously, is one of the sticking points. At our right hands, the policy community demands "objective" findings which may be translated into policy(ies) presumed to be value-neutral, or, if not value-neutral, then at least justified by some set of scientific "facts". On our left are audiences vastly removed from the policy community, who could put to good use research which lends itself to openendedness, flexibility and dynamism, which in turn creates strategic possibilities and opportunities. The ability to "speak in different registers", to engage in code-switching, to deploy semiotic interchanges as a means of addressing different audiences is not a set of skills that many academic possess, but it is a skill set that will be mandatory if we are to create—to bring into being—multiple audiences for whom we are "real" or "getting real".

Epilogue: Who Has Invented Whom?

In a recent piece, Ginnie Olesen (2001, p. 270) comments that "I could sense the audience creating the presenters". In our concern with broadening our view of those who might be valuable audiences for our research, it is probably instructive and bracing to remember that our audiences have "created" us as presenters, too. And the images which they have created are not very flattering.

For some instructive images, we might look to the spate of right-wing literature which has broken into the public consciousness over the past 20 years. In that literature we are "academic navel-gazers" (Daphne Patai, herself an academic), "pointy-headed intellectuals" (Spiro Agnew), "parasites" and purveyors of the "cult of meaninglessness" (Charles J.Sykes), or "tenured radicals" (Roger Kimball). Those epithets, however, are provided not by those with no access to higher education; rather they are bestowed from those who have enjoyed the fruits of higher education, and who stand among what passes for public intellectuals in a right-leaning social context.

Among those who do not hold college degrees, we are simply irrelevant. We frequently do no particular good for the communities in which we enact research; we sometimes do harm, although equally frequently, unintentionally (Fine, et al., 2000). We simply exist in an alternative dimension, unconnected to audiences at least as legitimate as our policy communities. On might argue—and I do—that the policy community is a particularly relevant audience for our research, because it is from the policy community that policies will issue which have the power to further open access to higher education, to redress the more powerful grievances enacted by

the 5th Circuit Court's lame attempt to address a foolish grievance, to provide the means to those without to achieve dreams beyond their social class.

Several issues germane to creating—or socially constructing—new audiences for ourselves, and for whom we might "get real" bear repeating. Minority members of academic worlds have long since learned to be border crossers. They frequently live both in and between two worlds (and are frequently not perfectly at home in either, in some ways). They might have much to teach mainstream higher education researchers about the possibilities of learning to speak across cultures. I have the feeling we ask such scholars far too little about how to learn, listen or speak cross-culturally, although they have much to teach us.

Second, in our search for social "facts" we lose much of the richness and texture which makes communities whole, fulfilling to their members, places where surviving commingles with thriving in ways which are deep with the meaning of cultural practices. These "embodied practices" to which Fiske refers are those which we often miss. We do not know how to look, and such practices—the material practices of experience, routines, relationships, the creation and moving-through of a dense "habitus"—are often not constituted as the "stuff" of higher education policy in any event. If we are to make some sense, however, of the striving to increase access to higher education (as one example), then we need to know about and understand the disconnects between the "habitus" of community, and the "habitus" of a campus environment. Exploring the textured existence of "habitus" needs to become a part of the thick description we utilize in both understanding our audiences, and in "translating" those audiences back and forth to each other.

Third, we have not yet begun to understand how to create the texts which would help us to "get real" to a larger set of audiences. Our research papers and texts tend to carry over the lingering after-taste of the unproblematic rhetoric of conventional science. Either the hypothesis was accepted, or it was rejected. No one in our newly-imagined audiences, however, cares a whit for the null hypothesis. We do not yet fully know how to write out of pain, out of unpredictability, out of inconclusiveness, out of changing social circumstance, out of a habitus which is constantly being enriched or impoverished. We need to keep working at this.

This audience creation of higher education policy researchers as irrelevant is another ontological fiction which we have the power to reconstruct via action and discourse. It is probably up to us to reach out.

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[1] Beninger's points address marketing and audience research in television production, but they apply as easily here, and philosophers of science have made similar points vis-à-vis the gendered, classed, and raced nature of the inquiry communities which have traditionally "produced" scientific findings. There is no reason to believe that television audience research is substantially different from higher education policy research, except that in the former, the research serves the end of corporate and industry survival, while in the latter, research serves at least the titular purpose of shaping public policy around a social "good". The end result, however, still posits research as one of the forms of a technology of control.

[2] This is also true in the case of evaluation or policy analysis inquiries. There is no artificial limitation on stakeholders which is dependent on the form of inquiry which is conducted (e.g., research, evaluation or policy analysis as forms of disciplined inquiry [see Lincoln and Guba, 1986]).

[3] This bizarre disconnect is rarely experienced by those who have moved toward an action research, or participatory action research, model of social inquiry. In those models (and there are many other names for this kind of research), research participants and inquirers work together in a conjoined community to specify what questions are of interest, what modes of data collection would be most useful in the particular context, and what the analyses mean. Such inquiry forms are both egalitarian and democratic, and they rely heavily on local idiom and local meaning for their interpretive stances. While the findings may ultimately be shared with the social science or policy communities more widely, and through more standard forms and means (conference papers, scholarly journals), the results are first and foremost for the use and deployment of community members.

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